

SALEM COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS
REORGANIZATION 2006
MAJORITY PARTY ADDRESS
DELIVERED BY FREEHOLDER BETH TIMBERMAN

Good Evening! I would like to thank you all for coming out tonight to attend the 2006 Reorganization of the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders. It is heart warming to see so many of you here tonight as we have moved to a much larger venue in order to accommodate not only the constantly growing audience but also to provide access for the disabled.

Welcome to all of our guests and appointees. Your commitment and dedication to serve the residents of Salem County is appreciated and we thank you for your willingness to serve in 2006.

You are part of a team that wants to make Salem County an even better place to live and work in. Your dedication to serve is just an example of what makes Salem County so rare and so special.

Welcome to our newest freeholder, Dave Lindenmuth. We all look forward to working with you, Dave. Congratulations to recently re-elected freeholders Chuck Sullivan and Bruce Bobbitt and welcome back.

Congratulations to our newly elected surrogate, Nicki Burke. We stand ready to assist you in any way.

The New Year is always a time for looking back at what was and looking ahead to what might be. It is when we list the accomplishments of a year that has now ended and glance forward and make pledges of what we hope to achieve.

2005 was a success in that the Board of Chosen Freeholders saw many goals achieved and even some that were exceeded. And, there were unforeseen opportunities in which we worked together with other partners to provide support and commitment to an industry that was so much a part of our economy.

Looking back at last year's Majority Report given by Chuck Sullivan, he outlined our goals for 2005. I am happy to say that we have been successful in achieving these goals.

The Freeholder Board worked hard again not to raise taxes last year and was even able to lower the tax rate by ½ cent. Working with the county operating budget in tight financial times, anticipating costs that continue to rise such as wages, benefits, insurance and now fuel while at the same time, delivering new programs and services to our citizens is one of the greatest challenges of being a freeholder.

In 2005 Salem County received over \$86,000 in reimbursements from the State of NJ for their use of the County Courthouse. This was the first year that we fully realized this financial benefit that will continue into the future. This Board will continue to work hard to identify grants, reimbursements and other programs that will insure Salem County continues to receive its fair share of the funds that our local taxpayers send to Trenton.

This past year saw many Salem County Roads and Bridge projects being completed. All you had to do was travel from one town to the next, and you realized that much of Salem County's 354 miles

saw a great deal of improvement. In the past five years, the county has spent \$12 million dollars on county roads repairing and repaving them to improve our drive and our safety.

Salem County consists of 35% wetlands and water, and we own over 117 bridges. We have invested over \$7 million in the past 5 years to maintain or improve these County structures and have much more work ahead. Many of you will recognize the new Penn-Salem Bridge connecting Pennsville to Salem City on Route 49. I want to thank our third district legislators for their work in securing millions necessary to complete this state bridge along one of our busiest arteries.

This year saw major investment and improvement to the county owned railroad. As part of the commitment and ongoing initiative started in 2003, we are upgrading 18 miles of this century old rail. As part of the 5-year goal to find funding for the railroad, we have already received a total of \$7.6 million! We have completed reconstruction of the first mile of this rail line, and are now working on the next three miles in the area of Action Station Road. We thank the businesses (Anchor Glass, Mannington Mills, SJ Farmer's Exchange, GE Fabricators) that have worked so closely with us to demonstrate the real need for this project.

We also thank the funding partners who provided us with the means to pay for this reconstruction. With the help of our Railroad Operator, District 3 Legislators and allies in Trenton, we have been able to compete with the many other projects that are lining up for these funds.

Our goal for Community Outreach was met in so many ways in 2005. We hosted public forums for Open Space planning. Smart Growth cross acceptance meetings continued throughout each municipality in Salem County. We sponsored an interactive public meeting to promote tourism.

The new 2-1-1 call system for public information has helped so many people locate public services that they otherwise might not find.

The Board is proud of how successful the Office for the Disabled has been. In July they hosted the first Disability Awareness Day which was attended by over 100 people. ADA accessibility continued to be enhanced throughout our County with ramps for the disabled springing up at our Library Commission, many private residences and even the Old Court House which is now accessible by a temporary portable ramp.

Community Outreach continued with our new state of the art 911-call center. We have a fine Working Team of EMS, Fire, Police, Health and Government Officials working together to make Salem County safer and more secure. Their most important goal is to protect the citizens and volunteers of Salem County. In the year 2005, we received \$550,000 in Homeland Security grant money to disperse throughout Salem County.

The Quality of Life Initiative is ridding our neighborhoods of crime, drugs, and illegal firearms, thanks to our Prosecutor, his staff and our local law enforcement organizations. I say we have an outstanding prosecution and conviction record! This proactive program reaches out to our youth, our schools, our faith based organizations and community groups to make Salem County a safer place for all of us.

We continue to enhance our buildings and beautify the grounds that we are in charge of. This past year saw the improvements to the parking lot behind the down town Salem county buildings as well as our nursing home; the Robert Gibbon Johnson House reopened; and the Board voted to stabilize the Alms House. A historic landmark, it is finally going to be preserved for some future and fantastic use.

We have become more environmentally astute and constructed a salt shed at our Road and Bridge Department for Stormwater protection.

We are very proud of the new initiatives that have occurred in Salem County.

We received a \$ 1 million PARIS Grant, which allowed us to open the new Office of Archives and Records Management now under the leadership of our former Deputy Clerk of the Board, Curt Harker.

The Open Space Advisory Committee was just a concept at this time last year and now after a full year of productive and open meetings, this hard working committee will produce the first County Wide Environmental Resource Inventory and Open Space Plan.

We strive to promote business and economic development in a joint venue that will provide education and outreach to small business entrepreneurs and met success with our first Entrepreneurial Training Institute last winter.

Economic Development is forming new partnerships:

County and local government bodies throughout Salem County partnered on many objectives of joint interest. This unity has become a strength for us. Business retention strategies continue to emerge to keep the fourth largest employer in the county from closing its doors, which could put 350 employees out of work, leave a gaping hole in the local economy and have a ripple effect on so many other jobs that depend on this industry as well.

By joining with experts like South Jersey Tourism Corp, we are now availing ourselves of much needed expertise to start promoting tourism throughout Salem County. In a \$32 Billion dollar a year industry, we rank last in the state. Indeed we have very far to go.

As we put together our first Familiarization Tour, it became apparent, that Salem County has a lot to offer. We took potential tour promoters on a bus tour to some of Salem County's Treasures.

Where else do you still have fairgrounds that are for real 4H fairs, not amusement rides, and where kids really do raise animals all year long in hopes of getting that big blue ribbon?

Where else in NJ do you still see nesting birds in a meadow and can stop right by the roadside and grab your binoculars, and stand there and watch the sunset on these birds and see nothing but sky and meadow and water in your view?

Where else can you go to a flea market by day and come back again at night for a real live rodeo?

Where else can you experience Revolutionary War history, Underground Railroad history, Civil War history, and maritime history all in one county?

We all know the answer to the above questions-
right here in Salem County-the Garden Spot of the Garden State.

It is time that we promote ourselves in a way that gets our little towns and hamlets known. We are so much more than 15 municipalities on a map that people pass through on their way to Atlantic City or the seashore. We are crossroad villages with history that need to be remembered and stories to be

shared. Pigs Eye, Greektown, Cattetown, Angelo's Landing, Pedrick's Landing, Cock's Hat, Dogtown Corner, Thompson's Bridge.

This is economic development in a new sense, not the way that most people expect with bricks and mortar, and asphalt. This industry, much like the Bird Watching industry, won't change the way we look, the way we live, the way we are, but will bring in tourism dollars and provide employment. Salem County, with two trails in the newly released New Jersey Audubon Society's publication: **Delaware Bayshore Birding and Wildlife Trails**, is surely going to be on the map for bird and wildlife enthusiasts.

It is up to Salem County how we want to promote Tourism.

Come be a part of the excitement. Be a part of the success.

We have achieved our goals from 2005 and we are proud to say "job well done".

However, the members of this board and the people of Salem County are expecting more in the future. We are representing them as elected officials and as such do so with an oath of office. Let us remember it is that oath, along with the pledge to represent all people that makes us public servants. We must each put our differences aside and work for the common good.

At times it is not so much what you do, but how you do it that matters most.

We will continue to make changes in the county structure and team to save taxpayer money, improve services and consolidate our operations.

Tonight we are unveiling new committee names and beginning our restructuring efforts that will continue to be revealed through the year.

I challenge each of my fellow freeholders to accept the change in lineup that will come when Director Ware "The Coach" calls and asks you to try a new spot on the team.

You may find you are even better in this new position and may help Salem County's citizens even more with these different skill sets.

So, with these new committee assignments, we should give it our best shot, and make every effort to learn about the departments that report to our committees.

Let us make sure that we are looking at how we can do things most effectively within our departments in order to trim unnecessary spending.

Sometimes it is the newest set of eyes or the outsider's question that really does start the process of how things can be done better and more efficiently.

We have so many talented employees here in the county ready and willing to help us. A team effort is needed but it will take some serious training on all of our parts.

With a new year ahead, we have set goals for the board for 2006. Notably, some may take longer than a year but need to be envisioned now and planned for.

For 2006 we will,

- Complete the County wide Environmental Resource Inventory and Open Space Plan
- Preserve our 20,000th acre of Farmland using funds that we bonded for last year
- Provide educational workshops on cluster zoning vs. downzoning to municipalities
- Install a Pavement Management System for County Roadways
- Continue to seek additional funding for Railroad reconstruction
- Enhance the Transportation Plan to encompasses services for underserved populations/areas and expands hours
- Promote Tourism Plan Development
- Provide support for Barrier Free Housing efforts
- Stabilize the Alms House

And our future goals where we envision a longer range plan include:

- Expanding our County Library services
- Completing renovations to the county owned railroad
- Offer scenic rail tours
- Enhance Transportation Services throughout the County
- Reoccupy the Alms House
- Pilot a County Wide Transfer Development Right Program- the First in the State and perhaps the first in the nation

This may seem optimistic and bright but I believe that there is a sun rising on the horizon in Salem County. Much like the return of the nesting eagles and wildlife that we see around the area, there is something special here unlike anywhere else. What we have to do is strike the balance between preservation of our farmland and open space; and preserve the endangered agricultural businesses as well. We must stimulate good growth with the right amount of proper planning, and a clear vision for a shared future together.

In an odd way, what is old, is new again.
Look around you, and think about what it is that you treasure.
Is it the people here, the places, the things, the history?

This Board goes forward into 2006 with some great challenges ahead of it and some significant obstacles to overcome. I believe with determined effort, we can show the public that we are capable of working together toward the greater good.

Tonight we pledge to restore unity on this Freeholder Board.

I thank you for the opportunity to share this report with you and good evening . . .